

Art

MONTHLY

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Steve McQueen interviewed by Patricia Bickers

Painting in the 90s I
Andrew Wilson on looking at painting

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similar display of her own improvisations on those examples. This poignant homage to unsung design used a palette of dirtied off-key colour similar to the gallery paintings, though here the patterns had less of that erotic mordancy. Interspersed among the collection on the shelves were her *trompe l'oeil* books, shaped wooden panels painted with similar endpaper designs, each with a classmark on the 'spine' appropriate to its location in the library.

Because this collection of art books is about to be broken up and absorbed into a library that has not even had the means to redecorate in 25 years, Heard's installation pointed to an imminent loss. In this case, the derivation of her patterns from a part of the book, usually ignored in the rush to the text, lent an appropriate modesty to an installation that was practically invisible. The painted wooden boards were of various sizes and hard to find on the shelves. Pulling these beautiful objects out conveyed something of the satisfaction and surprise at finding a long-sought book.

In this setting the intervention inevitably felt deeply melancholic; valedictory paintings made from the overlooked decorative features of neglected books, now threatened with indefinite storage. It was a good example of how Heard's carefully wrought style need be only slightly inflected to engage with different contexts. ■

Mark Harris

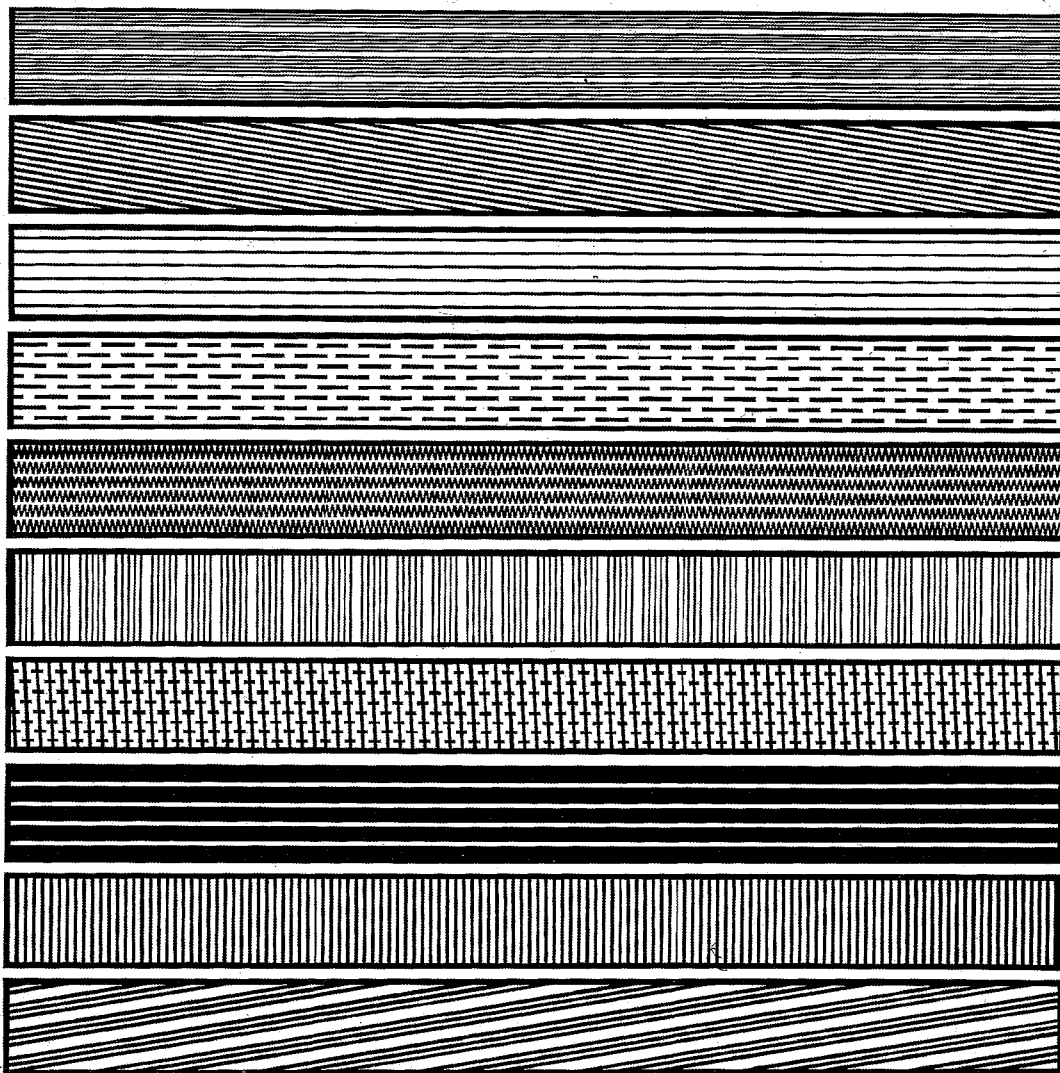
■ Angus Fairhurst

White Cube London October 28 to December 7

This clever show, after luring us into a number of humorous but unsatisfactory resolutions, ultimately settles for a conundrum. How can we reconstruct the dematerialised artist from his painting? Distracting us from underlying questions is Angus Fairhurst's façade of slack technique, seductive wit and references to other artists in an installation whose rock music, animation and uncommitted process abstraction suggest we simply enjoy it in its apparent immediacy.

Fairhurst is showing four paintings developed from indifferent computer designs yet supposedly based on a short animated video of his surrogate, the familiar undemonstrative gorilla. This animal has long been Fairhurst's other, as if a residual childhood projection of masculine power and ambivalent intentions. From the gorilla costume that he sloughs off by leaping about, to the looped video of the same animal repeatedly dropping and catching an unconscious man, the interdependence of artist with double is touchingly played out. In this new video the ill-fitting gorilla suit is shown facing forwards, tentatively swinging its arms and flexing its pectorals before breaking into five cross sections that rotate showing diagrammatic bones and flesh, in parody of Damien Hirst's sliced carcasses. These shapes are held in

Angus Fairhurst
Low Expectations 1996



position for a moment before being stretched across the screen into horizontal patterns that become the paintings' premise. At the end of this short sequence the patterns then appear to reconstitute the gorilla and the cycle begins again. This morph of artist/gorilla into diagrammatic language, though visually continuous, is a complete displacement of one representational system by another, of figuration by code. The casual indeterminacy of each stage of the image implies an innocent and uninformed attempt to depict scientific procedure. This slicing process dissolving into patterns cursorily summarising genetic codes, evokes both the human genome project and new software that accesses photographs of progressive dissections of the body. As a cartoon coding derived from the animated gorilla, it refers us back to Fairhurst as its source.

In a conversation with Hirst* the artist discusses the idea of reconstructing a destroyed world by scrutinising its ashes. It is in this sense that we should consider the proposition of recreating the dissected artist/gorilla from the coded remains constituting his paintings. These show ten horizontal bands (doubling the five gorilla slices) framed in black and set in from the edge. Each band is a different pattern which as the series progresses get laid over each other with increasing incoherence.

In its subtleties masked by insouciance there's the sense that Fairhurst's work makes light of a persistent notion of authenticity that is still providing a basis for other programmatic painters like Jonathan Lasker, Ian Davenport and Fiona Rae, in spite of their claims about challenging the suppositions of their idiom.

Fairhurst has employed sign painters whose methodic touch and regular pentimenti give the paintings a rhythm that relates to the discipline of the music in his video. This anodyne 70s-style rock fusion of Fairhurst's own band loops repetitive cycles into barely perceptible progressions, the same shrill guitar rising insistently above a rhythm section that sounds as if Kool and the Gang had got stuck in a groove by forgetting to make the chord changes.

One quality of this installation is the lightness and charm with which Fairhurst uses procedures that desubjectify the artist while still obliging a reading from artefact back to its origin. In the conversation mentioned before, Fairhurst refers to 'inhuman structures of over-civilisation' that must be continually fought in a fundamentally reactive way, in a kind of 'animal battle'. This is a clue both to the retention of the gorilla persona and to the implied critique of genetic science, represented here as arbitrary plottings which, in denying any coherent explanation, must always return us to the ambiguities of the body itself. ■

*From an Angus Fairhurst catalogue, Galerie Annalix, Geneva, 1992

Mark Harris is an artist working in London and New York.

■ Angela Bulloch

Robert Prime London November 1 to December 7

Angela Bulloch's exhibition at Robert Prime is her first in London since 1990. This fact is significant. If it comes as a surprise to us it probably says more about our preoccupation with what we think has been happening in the city over the past six years than it does about Bulloch's ability to show work. Apart from a few group shows in Britain she has been both making and showing work extensively elsewhere in Europe, the USA and Japan. Her work resides much more comfortably within a wider international context for contemporary art than it does as the focus of a more localised phenomenon. At a casual glance, entering Robert Prime is a bit like walking into a 60s edition of *Vogue* magazine. The sense of domestic Euro-chic is quite apparent and somewhat out of place in the more do-it-yourself rough and tumble that is now so commonly associated with 'young' British art. The space is brilliantly lit, has pristine white walls and an extremely pale floor. In one room sits an elegant stainless steel and primary red-cushioned 'bench' couch accompanied by a pair of retro 60s mushroom tables with matching flexi-stemmed lamps. In an adjacent room, shared with minimalist gallery office desks, is a giant red bean bag, or 'happy sack', encircling a button-like yellow-coloured drinks table. Less than a handful of framed pictures hang on the walls.

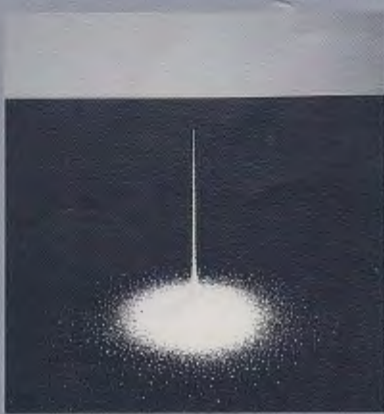
In true Bulloch style, the somewhat clinical serenity of this view is disrupted the instant a visitor passes through the front door. The door mat is fitted with sensors which trigger a sound system. A voice in computer-generated monotone reads extracts from a newspaper report covering the suicide/murder pact made by a group of young people. Bulloch has used this device to activate sound for a number of years. The first encountered by this reviewer was at the artist's 1990 show in the regional French town of Nevers. When treading on some loose floor boards one became the subject of a laughing crowd. Subsequent works have employed other points of activation such as the seats of chairs and a range of sounds including people clapping and the passing of an express train. In a sense this new piece, *Dye Hair Sound Mat*, is less aggressive – the 'activator' is not pin-pointed in the same way but it is actually more sinister. Controlling the sound in this way is less an avoiding or seeking of attention but is motivated by the fascination with the cold facts emanating from the speakers.

The seduction of violence has been touched on before by Bulloch but within the framework of a duality with its counterpart in a range of works where she has considered such notions as: on-off, order-chaos, programmatic-accidental, pleasure-pain – always within the push-pull of intervention by the viewer or the passing of time. *Dye Hair Sound Mat*, with its concerns for a particular historical event, may suggest a shift in emphasis away from the subjectivity of the viewer towards a wider social

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Steve McQueen
Bear 1993 (still)

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